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# Hilario Espinoza Gonzalez

## Entry details

Entry Name: Flourish in the Pines

Institution Name: Stephen F. Austin State University

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Hilario Espinoza Gonzaleza (Lumberjack Eats Marketing Director)

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## Essay:

Flourish in the Pines is a wellness program at Lumberjack Eats, launched in 2025 to make nutrition education accessible and engaging for students. Recognizing the importance of both physical and mental health, the program aims to fill gaps caused by stigma or lack of awareness that prevent students from using wellness resources fully. Its core mission has two parts: educating students about nutrition and guiding them on where to find wellness support. This approach led to a measurable change in behavior, with Marie Jessup reporting a 32% increase in nutrition consultations in 2025 and a total of 198 student visits, showing growing trust in professional nutrition support.

The program includes dynamic, interactive events called First Year Eats Teaching Kitchens, organized by Registered Dietitian Marie Jessup and the culinary team. These events give first-year students hands-on experience making healthy snacks, sampling nutritious foods in dining halls and retail outlets, and learning about ingredients. These Teaching Kitchens provide safe spaces where students can learn cooking skills from professional chefs while deepening their nutrition knowledge. In 2025, Marie hosted 22 wellness events, demonstrating strong student interest and expanding impact across campus.

To improve resource visibility, the program uses print materials, digital content, event activities, and well-placed guides designed to connect with students where they are. The wellness guides are accessible, visually appealing, and aligned with the main theme, serving both promotional and educational purposes to help students quickly understand tailored wellness information. A key resource is the detailed "Fueling Guides" created by Marie Jessup,

which help students understand meal balance and identify essential nutrients in campus dining options. These guides are distributed during nutrition events or at designated wellness tables, with Marie attending each event to reduce the perceived barrier to professional help and make asking a dietitian less intimidating. The athlete-specific “Fueling Your Performance” guide features portion-controlled reference plates and personalized nutrition advice for different training phases and goals. All materials are based on scientific research, clearly presented, and aim to improve nutritional awareness and confidence. This guide also supports the development of menus for athletes before, during, and after football training to help them feel their best on and off the field.

Partnerships with the Recreation Center and Residence Hall Association extend the program’s reach, ensuring content is timely, relevant, and integrated with existing wellness initiatives. The overall impact of Flourish in the Pines has been positive. Increased event participation and rising interest in offerings show that the initiative resonates with students. The allergen-friendly “Delicious Without” dessert program has been particularly successful, with demand surpassing traditional desserts after sampling and promotion, highlighting its influence on student choices. Through consistent messaging, strategic partnerships, and an evidence-based approach, Flourish in the Pines has raised awareness, built confidence, and encouraged active use of wellness resources among students, contributing to a healthier, more informed campus community.

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